DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 394 594 JC 960 329

AUTHOR Hoffman, Susan; And Others
TITLE Teaching and Managing: Conflicting Roles of the Department Chair.
PUB DATE Feb 96
NOTE 10p.; In: The Olympics of Leadership: Overcoming Obstacles, Balancing Skills, Taking Risks. Proceedings of the Annual International Conference of the National Community College Chair Academy (5th, Phoenix, AZ, February 14-17, 1996); see JC 960 276.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Effectiveness; *Administrator Responsibility; *Administrator Role; Burnout; *College Administration; Community Colleges; *Department Heads; Faculty College Relationship; Faculty Workload; Job Satisfaction; *Role Conflict; *Stress Variables; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

Community college department chairs are called upon to be colleagues and peers, managers, and teachers, with duties and responsibilities that are usually far more complex and demanding than any college document can convey. As a result of the demands of the position, department chairs may experience role conflict or strain. Role conflicts are contradictions individuals feel between roles because the expectations of one role are incompatible with the expectations of another. Chairs are expected to participate in the budget development process, course scheduling, faculty and administration representation, student advising, conflict resolution, personnel issues, and public relations. The effects of chair role conflict include personal and health problems, stress, and loss of family time and personal support systems. While there are no guaranteed strategies to resolve role conflict, recommended techniques include the following: (1) develop chair networks for support; (2) survey department faculty for input; (3) perform and share with department faculty serious constructive evaluations; (4) avoid feeling that all decisions must be made "on the spot"; (5) employ effective time management skills; and (6) leave problems at the office. (TGI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 394 594

TEACHING AND MANAGING:

CONFLICTING ROLES OF THE DEPARTMENT CHAIR

By

Susan Hoffman
Chair, Speech/Dance/Theatre

Matt Schulte
Chair, Philosophy/Foreign Language/Professional Writing

Don Smith
Chair, Visual Communication Technology

Nathan Starr
Chair, Social Science/Anthropology/Criminal Justice

Montgomery Community College
Rockville, MD

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Paper Presented at the
Fifth Annual International Conference for
Community & Technical College Chairs, Deans and Other Organizational Leaders
February 14 - 17, 1996
Phoenix/Mesa, Arizona

JC 960 329

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ACADEMY
471

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN **OTHER THAN PAPER COPY** HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

G. Filan

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

SUSAN HOFFMAN

Department of Speech, Dance, and Theater; Montgomery College, Rockville MD. M.A. 1971: University of Maryland; Montgomery College faculty since 1972; Chair for 4+ years; N.C.C.C.A conference 1993, 1994; Managing Director for College Performing Arts Series for 7 years; directed more than 60 theater productions; Artistic Director for College Summer Dinner Theater

MATT SCHULTE

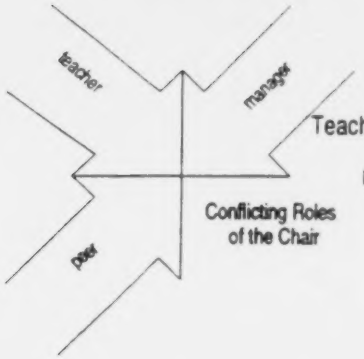
Department of Philosophy, Foreign Languages, and Professional Writing; Montgomery College, Rockville MD. M.A. 1969; Montgomery College since 1981; Department of Philosophy, Foreign Languages, and Professional Writing; Chair for 2+ years; N.C.C.C.A conference 1993, 1994

DON SMITH

Department of Visual Communications Technologies; Montgomery College, Rockville, MD. M.Ed. 1988; Montgomery College faculty since 1981; Chair for 4+ years: N.C.C.C.A. conference 1993.

NATHAN STARR

Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminal Justice. Montgomery College, Rockville, MD. M.A. Texas Southern University; Montgomery College faculty since 1972; Chair for 3+ years; N.C.C.C.A conference 1993, 1994



Teaching And Managing: Conflicting Roles Of The Department Chair

by Nathan Starr

presenters: Susan Hoffman, Matt Schulte, Don Smith and Nathan Starr

This workshop will focus attention on the role confusion and role strain inherent in the peer chair position. Department chairs are to be colleagues/peers, managers and teachers. How might a peer chair resolve these conflicts? Are they resolvable? Can they be prioritized? This workshop will involve a group activity and discussion of possible solutions to dilemmas. This workshop will not prove beneficial to peer chairs who do not experience role conflict, a fortunate and rare situation.

An Unofficial Definition of the Peer Chair's Role:

As chartered agencies of government, community colleges have governing documents that outline the duties and responsibilities of all employees. Included in these documents is a description of the peer chair's position(the terms *peer chair* and *department chair* are used interchangeably in this paper.) Reading these documents (at Montgomery College this document is called THE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL), we can get a "sense" of the duties and responsibilities associated with the position. However, the job is usually far more complex and demanding than any college document can convey to unsuspecting new chairs. Faculty at community colleges are citizen soldiers waiting for the call to serve their department and institution. They are advocates for faculty. Chairs are responsible for facilitating teaching and learning. At many colleges, the chair is appointed in consultation with the department faculty. The department faculty may hold an election to decide whom they wish to recommend, as chair, to the appropriate administrator. The position may rotate with most department members expected to take a turn. If we think of a chair in the university model, the position calls up "images" of prestige and authority. Frequently, "prestige and authority" are not the reality for community

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

college chairs. When colleagues elect a leader, since our own peers have chosen us, an aura of respect is conveyed.

Well, that is the glorified version. Chairs can be elected, sometimes repeatedly, because no one else wants the job. Although the job must be done, it usually comes with very little real authority in the scheme of general operating conditions at a community college. It can be a thankless job but a job that must be done. Chairs recognize the need to provide representation and leadership for departments in carrying out their academic, program and fiscal responsibilities. Chairs represent the viewpoint of the faculty, who are in the academic trenches, to administration, boards of trustees, students and the community -- their constituencies. Chairs must also report back to their department colleagues the viewpoints of those constituencies. An effective chair must understand the needs and priorities of the department so that appropriate planning and budgeting can be implemented.

Definition of the Chair's Conflicts:

For purposes of this paper we shall define role conflict as the conflicts and contradictions one feels between roles, because the expectations of one role are incompatible with the expectations of another role. Role conflict may cause chairs to feel pulled, or torn, between different demands or expectations to which she/he must respond. Chairs wear multiple hats in the performance of this complex job. Chairs may be expected to participate in the budget development process of an instructional area, or institution, which includes the department the chair represents. Role conflict and/or role strain can arise especially in times of financial crises in trying to balance the interests of the department against the needs of the institution at-large. It should be noted that seldom does the ultimate responsibility for budget rest with a chair. Instead, budget responsibility is under the authority of an institutional dean, or other administrator, ranked higher in the institutional hierarchy. This crisis may be alleviated, somewhat, if a department has strong enrollment and high student/faculty ratios.

Department chairs are responsible for the construction of course schedules. Role conflict, or role strain, can develop trying to balance the needs of students and the institution against the schedule preferences of colleagues.

Department chairs serve as liaison between faculty and administration. This role requires the chair to represent the viewpoints and needs of the department faculty and associated academic programs. It also requires the chair to present the administrative "point-of-view" to the faculty. Since these perspectives are rarely the same, a chair can feel as though her/his head has been placed on the chopping block. Role strain results when trying to balance the responsibilities of the chair with the role expectations of faculty peers with whom one must work. This conflict can compromise the chairs' authority and exacerbates the problem of having responsibility without power.

Chairs must advise students, colleagues and, frequently, administrators in conflict resolution. Suffice it to say, these different groups usually have conflicting perspectives, responsibilities and objectives in performing their respective roles in the college.

Chairs are money managers without being able to actually control money. At present, the institution we represent allows chairs to control only instructional supplies -- paper, transparencies, pencils, etc. (This may be seen as a real indicator of the extent of chairs' power.) Money being the blood of an institution can be an emotional topic for all constituencies in the institution. Financial realities can quickly conflict with faculty wants, student and program needs, administrative expectations and demands, versus what funding is actually available to operate an institution.

Peer chairs are also personnel managers. Often, chairs must manage the health issues, religious issues, personalities, and personality conflicts and different teaching styles of their colleagues.

A dilemma facing department chairs involves trying to balance the conflicting roles of colleague/peer, manager and teacher. Most community college chairs are members of the faculty teaching for more than 60% of their expected workload. Often there is the question of balancing time commitments to the various roles. How much time should one put into teaching and preparation? How can this be balanced against the time chairing a department requires? Are office hours for meeting students or, can we squeeze in a little chair work? As members of the faculty, chairs must keep current in their fields of study. Finally, they must read and grade papers and develop evaluation instruments for students. Generally, chairs are peers of the faculty and, eventually, will

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"go back" to the full-time faculty.

Lastly, chairs must be public relations experts interacting with the constituent communities and representing the department and college in an authoritative manner. This role may include serving as expert to local newspapers and other media, problem solving to resolve grievances with community and students, always representing the college in the most positive light.

Adding to these issues is the reality that few community college chairs are trained for the position, and there are few on-the-job training opportunities. This is a job where most learn by doing and that can be very challenging.

Is it any wonder department chairs may, sometimes, feel like pulling out their hair? In all fairness the job can be very rewarding when chairs are successful in accomplishing their goals while resolving these role conflicts.

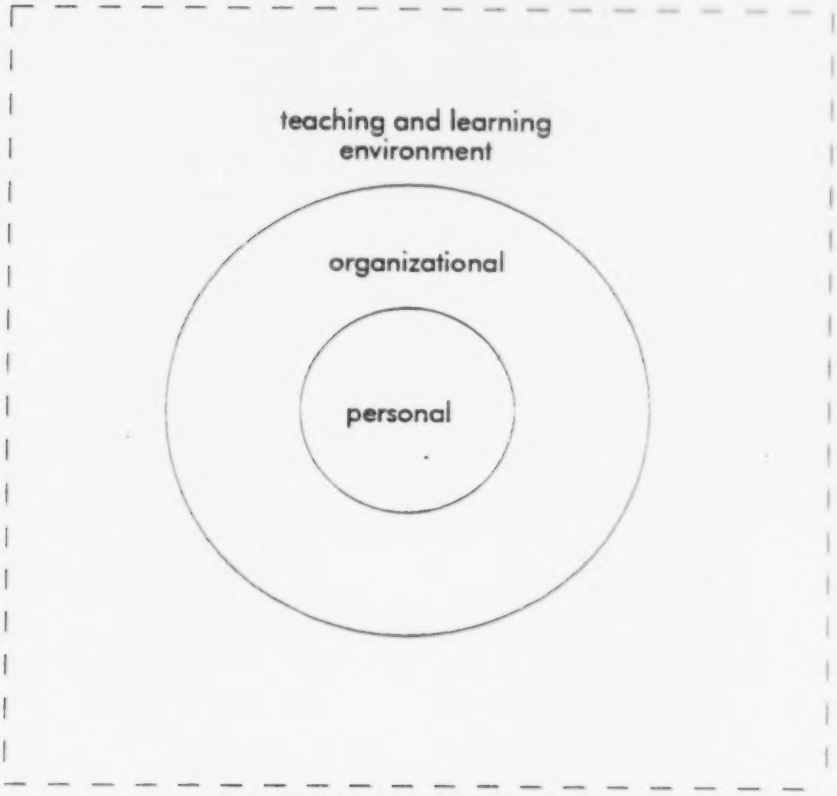
Why Do Peer Chairs Wear Out?:

Role conflict is inherent in the job of a peer chair. A person in that position actively involved in the resolution of that conflict is very likely to wear out. In most organizational structures, the position is placed where it can absorb conflict, to serve as a bearing between the sometimes conflicting imperatives of the organization and the classroom. Such a buffer often allows the organization to move forward while protecting the instructional integrity of the academic programs. But this wear and tear can lead to some very real consequences for chairs and the institution -- personal and health problems for the chair, functional difficulties in the institution and, ultimately, deterioration of the teaching/learning environment.

Personal and health problems manifest themselves in the effects of unrelieved stress. Physical symptoms and illness may accompany or, result from, chair stress. A chair may lose time away from home, family and other personal support systems they were able to access in the past. This may wear severely on the quality of these neglected relationships. These problems can lead to burnout extending beyond this one individual.

Organization problems may manifest themselves in poor decision making, poorly developed priorities. An inertia resulting from the above personal effects of conflict could prevent work from getting done. Further compounding organizational problems, there may be difficulty in focusing on goals and priorities affecting the department and the college. Avoidance of problems and decision making can produce poor work performance, as well as, affect student learning.

One of the more immediate effects on the chair/teacher and, other teachers, is subjecting students to bad teaching. The educational environment can impair student learning(some learn anyway.)



Ripple Effect of Chair Burnout

Additional Ambiguities: As a peer chair ...

- ... how do you meet the challenge to serve equitably and fairly, with limited resources, departments of varying sizes and/or multiple disciplines.

- ... how do you confront problems in a collegial manner without sacrificing personal values? How is the role of collegiality in faculty/chairs relations, especially in times of conflict, to be defined?

- ... how do you walk the line between fairness and impartiality in student complaints, especially when the student is right?

- ... how do you resolve the conflict between chair's perception of authority and the administration's interpretation?

- ... how do you resolve 50/50 splits in department faculty members' views towards "change versus no change"? How do you resolve inertia? When change is needed and, there is a split in faculty attitudes regarding change, how do you initiate the process of change?

- ... how do you facilitate technological advances in teaching and learning when, as many as half of the faculty resist change in support of mediocrity and the status quo?

- ... how do you cope with the various personalities of department personnel, some of which may be difficult, in an honest and directive manner?

- ... how do you define "accountable" when holding people accountable? In what ways can a chair hold faculty/staff accountable?

- ... how do you address hidden agendas?

- ... how do you set boundaries to the life of a chair? What are "chair hours"? Are they different from "office hours"? When

are you not a chair?

- ... how do you define your first constituency? (Everyone seems to think they should come first.)

- ... how do you determine when you need support? How much support can you get?

Resolution of the Chair's Role Conflict and Role Strain:

There are no sure fire formula for resolution of these dilemmas facing chairs, unless the college turns over massive amounts of authority to said chairs -- ha ha. Realistically, chairs must be prepared to cope with these ambiguities and learn to think on their feet to confront problems as they arise.

Outcomes and Recommendations:

1. As a source of support, develop chair networks.
2. Survey department faculty for input.
3. Cover yourself- leave a paper trail.
4. Perform, and share with department faculty, serious constructive evaluations. Where appropriate write letters to personnel files.
5. Nothing says you must decide "on the spot."
6. Manage your time well. Good time management skills are called for in this role.
7. Let go of it! Leave your problems at the office. Remember the other roles you play in life --family member, community member, et cetera.

For the benefit of students' academic success and the smooth operation of the institution, the chair's position is vital. When done well, the position is very rewarding. One can facilitate the smooth operation of the department, the college and students' achievement of their respective goals. Because of these rewards, it is a job worth doing.